

critical digest

VOL. III No. 22

January 29, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Where's Charley?-Broadway, 1/29/51. Four week revival of Frank Loesser's musical version of "Charley's Aunt". Starring Ray Bolger and Allyn McLerie...D'Oyly Carte Opera Company-St. James, 1/29/51. Four week engagement of famous Gilbert and Sullivan operas opens with "The Mikado"...The Green Bay Tree-Golden, 2/1/51. Revival of Mordaunt Shairp's play of the 1930s. Produced and directed by Shepard Traube. Cast features Joseph Schildkraut, Denholm Elliott and Anne Crawford...The Rose Tattoo-Martin Beck, 2/3/51. Tennessee Williams' new play, produced by Cheryl Crawford, staged by Daniel Mann. Maureen Stapleton and Eli Wallach are featured.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on back page

Richard II-City Center, 1/24/51. Completely unanimous verdict registered by first night critics on Margaret Webster's revival starring Maurice Evans in the role that made him an American favorite in 1937. Equal praise was shared by Evans, Webster and the supporting cast. Only Atkinson, Times, felt Betsy Blair was weak in the role of the queen. Several commented that current limited run production was best showing of Shakespeare in many years. Coleman, Mirror, noted that Evans played the role more manly than he did before. While Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, doubts if production has as much polish. Kent Smith, Frederic Worlock and Louis Hector were singled out for applause. In spite of the rave reviews, it is doubtful if production can be extended for any length of time because Evans and Blair must return to Hollywood by March 5th.

Darkness at Noon-Alvin, 1/13/51. Playwright Company's production of Sidney Kingsley's adaptation of the Koestler novel was viewed from diverse angles by the weekly reviewers. Time, Billboard and New Yorker appraisers praised anti-Communist play starring Claude Rains as brilliant, intelligent theatre. Francis, Billboard, urged that every American who cares for this way of life should see the play. But Variety and Newsweek critics weren't as enthusiastic. Former felt there was too much philosophical conversation and not enough direct action or audience identification, while former felt that it was difficult to work up any more than academic sympathy for the hero. All agreed on brilliance of Rains' portrayal. Gabriel, Cue, filed a "so-so" report tabbing the show as a strong event of the season, but not necessarily the best. Direction and casting by Kingsley merited as many kind words as the script.

Second Threshold-Morosco, 1/2/51. Alfred de Liagre's production of Philip Barry's last play as revised by Robert E. Sherwood, continues to draw mixed reaction from the weekly critics. Brown, SRL, and Kern, Commonweal, considered the entire production in true Barry style, though both had minor reservations. Kerr thought Clive Brook's performance good enough to justify attending, although he was disappointed with Margaret Phillips stylized performance. Brown enjoyed performance but found that some of the scenes were vague and unresolved. George Jean Nathan panned show as being the most verbose and garrulous of several seasons. He wished Barry had stuck to light comedy, rather than philosophical chatter.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Patrons would be wise to check current cast before entering theatre if they don't want to be disappointed. Arena Theatre's Derrick Lynn Thomas explains that management was unaware of "free publicity plug" given Arms and the Man by monster electric headline sign under the Bond waterfall; and that window cards falsely listing Sam Wenamaker were not all picked up. The buyer beware is only safe way to buy theatre tickets these days.

' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the shows for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Women's Wear Daily | 21. Freeman |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. George Jean Nathan | 24. Chr. Sci. Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass | 15. Ward Morehouse | 25. Sat. Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. Morning Telegraph | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Journal American | 17. Variety | 27. Time |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard | 28. Nation |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 19. Theatre Arts | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Newark News | 20. New Leader | 30. New Yorker |

AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30.

Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-21-22.

BLESS YOU ALL-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Pro: 13 votes. Con: 1-5-10-11-14-15-17-18-22-27-29.

CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-8-12-20-22-25-29. So-So: 14.

THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30.

DARKNESS AT NOON-Booth, 1/13/51. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10. Con: 1. So-So: 5.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-28.

So-So: 14-18-22-23-27.

GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St. Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 28.

THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.

KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29.

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING-Royale, 12/8/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 3-11-29. So-So: 17-30.

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 14. So-So: 2-27-30.

OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-13-23-29-30.

Con: 1-3-9-12-17-18-20-22-24-26-27. So-So: 2.

PEEP SHOW-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-9-10-13-15-16-18-23.

Con: 1-2-11-14-19-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-12-17.

PETER PAN-St. James, 4/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 7-14-30. So-So: 15-18.

SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10.

SECOND THRESHOLD-Moresco, 1/2/51. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-26-30.

Con: 4-9-13-17-18-23-27-28.

SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30.

Con: 27. So-So: 23.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 5-24-28.

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' Green Room Department '
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WHO IS ANTA?...Judged by current activities, George Jean Nathan thinks it is time to check the competence of those who have constituted themselves the Executive Officers of ANTA. Just who and what are they? What, if anything, have they previously done to justify their self nomination to conduct such a lofty enterprise?

SUGGESTION BOX...Managements should turn lights up part way during curtain calls so actors can see their friends, the audience, recommends Chapman, News...Crosby, Herald Tribune, should read the drama critics before he assails them again urges Watts, Post...Kim Stanley, House of Bernarda Alba, is a good bet for TV points out Billboard...Broadway needs plays with Bobby Clark, Ed Wynn and Bert Lohr, sighs Morehouse, WT&S.

LONDON'S BEST PLAYS...From the over 100 West End theatre productions in 1950 Ralph, Stage, picked Wynward Browne's home grown English comedy The Holly and The Ivy as the best of the year. Other top choices include several plays by Christopher Fry and Jean Anouilh, which have not yet been seen here.

THAT EXTRA TICKET...Plight of bachelor critic McClain, Journal American, who has extra ticket to first nights drew solutions from here readers. Take George Jean Nathan and let him write the review for you. Leave the ticket in the phone booth and see what turns up. Sell the ducat to a scalper, or run an involved dinner party; and of course, the usual number of requests to "take me".

FOR AGENCY HIKE...Theatre News Weekly recommends that N.Y. Stage Legislature grant ticket brokers request for 25 cents increase per ticket. This would strengthen position of legitimate agents against illegal operators who scalp tickets.

WHY THEATRE PARTIES...Producers who sell theatre parties before opening night shouldn't be condemned by harassed ticket buyer, points out Burr, Playbill. Such a producer is merely trying to protect his investors. In the past five years the columnist doesn't know of one case where parties were sold after opening night raves.

MOST SONG HITS...Showboat had most song hits of any musical of this century guesses Durling, Journal American. Ol' Man River, Make Believe, Bill, Can't Help Lovin' That Man and Why Do I Love You were listed.

WIMAN OBITS...Romeo and Juliet production planned by the late Dwight Deere Wiman, starring Olivia de Havilland, will prove a most fitting memorial to the producer, comments Hawkins, WT&S...Chapman, News, wonders where the young fellows are coming from to take the place of such older theatrical managers. Wiman had decency, imagination and self-reliance; virtues young producers can copy.

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' Theatre News Round-Up '
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Shows that closed include Peter Pan...King Lear received two week reprieve...Enemy of the People one week. Latter continued with Robert Simon and Lulla Adler in the Marches roles...BBC to show 15 minute trailers from London current shows...John McClain, Journal American, will emcee "Celebrity Service"...AM and TV show based on Earl Blackwell's service...WJZ Mary Margaret McBride is having studio built in her apartment...Jose Ferrer and Gloria Swanson spoke to first monthly Drama Students Seminar at Rosoff's...DuMont's "Arthur Murray Time" has standing offer of \$12,500 to celebrities who have not appeared on TV, with bulk of fee given to charity...Helen Hayes, first, to accept money going to Mary MacArthur Polio Fund...Professional Children's School benefit for same cause was held Jan. 21 at Golden...Paul Lukas spoke to 540 high school editors...CBS invested \$200,000 in George Abbott musical based on "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn"...N.Y. Gilbert and Sullivan Society will entertain D'Oyly Carte players before opening on Feb. 23...Lily Pons and Noel Coward recording "Conversational Piece" for Columbia...Chorus Equity voted to obtain equality with Actors Equity...Camp Shows, Inc. formed to do work of USO.

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' Interview Hi-Lights '
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OWEN DAVIS...Pulitzer prize author believes television must develop writers of its own, he told Coleman, Mirror. Icebound will be produced on CBS TV Prudential Family Playhouse Jan. 30, one day after his 77th birthday. The man who had one play on Broadway for 37 consecutive years now only writes 3000 words a day. He sharpens 40 pencils and fills 40 pipes. When they are finished he calls a halt.

GEORGE SCHAEFER...City Center executive producers urged formation of nationwide circuit to show plays first presented at Center, Theatre News Weekly discovered. Other cities could form corporations with the aid of wealthy people. Actors would get full salaries while on tour in the circuit.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Angel in the Pawnshop-Booth, 1/18/51. A.B.Shiffirin's whimsical comedy polled only one favorable vote from the weekly aisle sitters. Francis, Billboard, who had viewed tryout at Westport, Conn. Playhouse last summer, found production improved in all departments. Eddie Dowling and Joan McCracken head a perfect cast in the warm and kindly comedy. But remainder panned play as second rate Saroyan. Hobe, Variety, summed up the dissenting view by suggesting script needed more restraint and much more imagination. He also thought Dowling overacted, while McCracken lacked the vocal dimensions for the role. John E. Blenkinship's sets and Will Irwin's music continued to draw top honors from the dissenters.

Four Twelves are 48...48th St.Theatre, 1/17/51-1/18/51. Six weekly critics agreed with their daily colleagues who panned Joseph Kesselring's script as a waste of effort. Time billed it as nearly the worst play since 1941, the year the author wrote the successful Arsenic and Old Lace. Gibbs, New Yorker, was intrigued with the Ernest Truex part which consisted of "ugh". Here was a role the critic was sure he could manage. Variety critic thought the Raymond Sovey sets were the most professional item in evidence.

An Enemy of the People-Broadhurst, 12/28/50-1/27/51. Two weekly critics found a new kind of excitement in the Arthur Miller adaptation of the Ibsen classic. Clurman, New Republic, and Kerr, Commonwealth, pointed out that the script makes the audience the play's protagonist. Both noted that there was some confusion and ambiguity in the script. Frederic March and Morris Carnovsky were praised for their fine portrayals.

King Lear-National, 12/25/50. All departments of the Cohen and Joseph revival were applauded by Brown, SRL. His only criticism was toward acting of Jo Van Fleet and Edith Atwater which he didn't consider up to part. Direction by John Houseman, sets by Ralph Alswang, and music by Marc Blitzstein were all perfect. Louis Calhern was magnificent, while Arnold Moss was termed as one of our best Shakespearean actors.

Out of This World-Century, 12/21/50. Cole Porter's newest musical was panned by Kerr, Commonwealth and Shipley, New Leader, for proving without a doubt that sex can be dull. But Clurman, New Republic, found it a trim and sprightly affair, in spite of its weak score and old story. Charlotte Greenwood's return was hailed.

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' Legit Stuff '
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Richard LeMarr, agent, won \$40,000 from Kiss Me Kate producers...Burl Ives set up producing office...Ray Bolger to film "Where's Charley?" in London next summer... Council of Living Theatre will profit from earnings of Robert Sherwood's new film "Main Street to Broadway" which will be filmed in New York at a cost of \$1,000,000... West Coast Company of Guys and Dolls formed by Feuer and Martin...RCA has made an offer for Dwight Wiman's production of The Green Pastures for TV and records.

